Minutes of the

Meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches

Video Conference, 1-3 June 2020

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1. First session, 1 June – opening actions

A. Welcome by the moderator

Dr Agnes Abuom (Anglican Church of Kenya), moderator of the central committee, moderated the hearing session. She welcomed the group to the first ever meeting of the executive committee held by video conference. She expressed thanks to God for the opportunity to meet after such a long time. She said that we are all living in challenging times. She thanked the staff who worked so hard to ensure that the executive committee could meet virtually and expressed her thanks also to Mrs Anne Glynn Mackoul (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East) for helping with the legal framework for meeting in this way. She reminded the group that all the documents for the meeting had been posted on the Governing Body Document Resource and Discussion Portal ("the portal"). She asked the members to have available their indicator cards, mailed to each of them in advance.

She welcomed the interim general secretary, Fr Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, who was participating in this meeting of the executive committee for the first time in his new capacity, and thanked God for the installation of the former general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, as presiding bishop of Norway.

She asked for a minute of silence for the members of the governing bodies who had been called home by God, for those from the WCC member churches affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and for the difficult situation in the USA. A minute of silence was observed.

Bishop Mary Ann Swenson (United Methodist Church), vice-moderator of the central committee, was invited to lead the group in prayer on the first day. An image of a sailing vessel from the Pacific islands was projected. Over hundreds of years the Pacific Islanders travelled the ocean in this way, guided by the stars at night and sun by day. It was meant to remind the committee of the ecumenical vessel now – a small boat trying to navigate the way in turbulent waters. The church was born in tumult yet emerged from the chaos with potent, life changing message relevant to all cultures and contexts. She led the group in prayer.

The meeting of the executive committee was officially declared convened by the moderator.

B. Roll call

Instead of a traditional roll call, the members' presence was registered through the video conference tool (see appendix for list of participants).

Apologies were noted for the following members of the committee:
- HE Dr Archbishop Abune Aregawi, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Rev. Taaroanui Maraea, Église protestante Maohi

A quorum of 21 members was confirmed.

C. Approval of agenda

Dr Abuom presented the agenda for the meeting adding that the committee might have to take an action in response to the situation of violence in the USA. The agenda for the meeting was approved by consensus.

Dr Abuom said that for the statement on the role of the churches and COVID-19, the moderator of the public issues sub-committee, HE Metropolitan Prof. Dr Nifon of Targoviste (Romanian Orthodox Church), would be expected to work with the CCIA director, Mr Peter Prove, on revising the statement. The members were asked to send their comments in to the public issues email or post them on the portal. Mr Prove added that he had also consulted with the CCIA commission members, as is the normal practice for public issues statements.

The moderator reminded the group that the three-day meeting during this week was to focus on critical decisions, recognizing that there is a proposal to meet again in July for further follow up of the executive committee's business.

2. Remarks of the moderator

The moderator, Dr Agnes Abuom, offered some brief remarks. She said that COVID-19 is a globalized problem with the impact being felt everywhere and no one is spared. The nature and scope of that impact may be different but there are three things most communities are struggling with:

- There is a resurgence of different forms of violence – domestic violence, street violence and psychological violence.
- Poverty has increased as businesses closed leading to more and more unemployment. Those who have no way to earn a living can no longer meet the daily needs of their households. The traditionally poor groups have become poorer while the lower and middle classes are also sinking down. This brings more stress to families, communities and in turn contributes to serious health challenges, in addition to the spread of the virus.
- The health sector is unable to cope with the impact of COVID-19, in addition to the normal health issues in many countries. Most of frontline health workers are stressed.

For the church, the ministry of presence and pastoral work among health workers is a real challenge in these times. When churches are closed, the fellowship is seriously affected. Even as churches meet online or in house/family churches, gathering together is sorely missed. While the churches are challenged to accompany people confronted with food insecurity they face their own financial worries as offerings cannot be collected. This has resulted in churches workers also being let go, adding to the number of unemployed. In Kenya, those who are living in the informal settlements, where her church ministers, are really suffering. The kind of stigma that was experienced with the HIV/AIDS pandemic is now resurfacing in relation to the spread of COVID-19.

She added that during the weekend the former dictator of Rwanda, Felicien Kabuga, was arrested in France. This gives hope to the people in Rwanda, even after 25 years. She also thanked the staff for the good farewell service organized for the former general secretary.

3. Accountability report of the general secretary

Fr Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, interim general secretary, was invited to present the accountability reports for April and May 2020. The full text of his report is as follows:

> Eminences, your Graces, dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
>
> As we meet on this Whit Monday, following the great feast of Pentecost celebrated in many of our WCC member churches, I will start by invoking the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of courageous witness and the Giver of Life, to come upon us and to abide in us, and to lead and to empower us in our deliberations.
>
> Then, I would like to express to you all my thanks and gratitude for the trust you showed to me by voting in favour of the proposal of the leadership of the central committee to appoint me as Interim general secretary. I feel both honoured and humbled by such a great responsibility. I will do my best to ensure, until the election of a new general secretary, that our ecumenical boat advances through the challenging waves of our present times and that we continue preparing for a good assembly which will give direction to the future ecumenical movement.
>
> I am also glad to see all of you, though I would much prefer to welcome you to Bossey. Using Zoom is new for all of us and we are learning together how to move forward. Thank you for your patience and your participation.
>
> As you are aware, all our communities and the whole world have been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Though our local situation is improving, Geneva has had more cases per capita than any other canton in Switzerland, our borders remain closed and most staff have been working from home for more than two months. This will continue until at least the 15th of June.
>
> Over the past months, I have been inspired by the response of my colleagues in adapting to new ways of working, adjusting to the demands of social isolation and physical distancing, and advancing important programmatic initiatives using social and digital media.
>
> We have all been strengthened by the leadership of the central committee in guiding the WCC response to the pandemic and ensuring that the governing bodies of the WCC continue to function as provided by our rules. I am particularly grateful to Dr Agnes Abuom, His Eminence Metropolitan Gennadios and Bishop Mary Ann Swenson for their leadership and support in a time of transition.
>
> Since 1 April, when I began as acting general secretary, we have prepared monthly accountability reports to record how we are adapting and share what we are doing. You already received the reports. I would also like you to know that every week I send a letter to the staff about how we are advancing in our work together.

You have the accountability reports for the record. I would like to highlight a few points to help frame the work of this meeting in assessing how we continue our calling to serve the WCC fellowship of member churches.

1. Accompanying the fellowship

From the beginning of the pandemic, the leadership of the central committee guided our response. You have seen the pastoral letters from the moderator of the central committee encouraging the churches to implement the measures needed to protect lives, especially for the most vulnerable.

During all this period, the WCC on-line publications have been resourcing the fellowship with prayers, reliable information, new publications and webinars.

Already in February we established a COVID support team to help churches address the pandemic and the related issues of health and healing, sexual and gender-based violence, diaconal service; the needs of children and young people; and the joy of our common faith in the resurrected Christ.

Together with regional ecumenical organizations, we issued a statement encouraging churches "to adapt our modes of worship and fellowship to the needs of this time of pandemic infection, in order to avoid the risk of becoming sources of viral transmission rather than means of grace."

In preparation for Holy Week, the WCC assisted the World Health Organization in establishing "Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19."

We implemented a Thursdays in Black ambassadors' campaign to address the increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence and vulnerability of children.

The pandemic reminds us that church leaders have a critical role to play in their communities and in society in helping people understand why change is needed and how, as people of faith, we can adapt.

2. Complying with restrictions

In compliance with Swiss authorities, WCC staff have been working from home since mid-March. The Ecumenical Centre remains closed to the public but has been equipped with the required safety measures to allow some staff and tenants to begin returning.

About 60 staff, mainly serving at the Bossey hotel and conference centre or in support services at the Ecumenical Centre, have had their working hours reduced. This is likely to last until mid-June. In accordance with COVID-19 compensation measures implemented by the Swiss authorities, the WCC submitted requests for reimbursement at 80% for the reduced working hours. The WCC staff that accepted reduced working hours all receive 100% of their salary.

In light of local and global restrictions, I informed WCC staff that no activities should be planned for the rest of the year that require travel for staff or participants, unless an exception is granted. We do expect to receive students at Bossey in September.

3. Impact on the programmes and budget
The COVID-19 pandemic has a significant impact on what was planned for both 2020 and 2021, including the assembly. Some activities have been cancelled or postponed, like the central committee meeting. Many activities are being implemented with electronic communications. Many meetings and events scheduled to take place at Bossey are cancelled. Some churches and funding partners had to reduce their contributions and exchange rates have not helped.

The pandemic affected the schedule of sales for the Green Village, which have now resumed. Results for Montreal have been good. It will guarantee a successful financial year 2020 for WCC despite all the challenges encountered; an increase in funds and reserves of CHF 9 million is projected in the revised budget because of the project. With a net CHF 3.4 million of general reserves invested in Green Village from general reserves in prior years, and as discussed in November 2019, it remains to be determined whether a further transfer from the project should be made to general reserves for 2021.

We recognise that special measures will be required for planning in 2021, and that this requires consultation with the executive committee before plans and budgets are brought for approval in November this year.

We are recommending that the executive committee approve a revised budget for 2020 setting revised expenditure limits, and recognising that the general reserves will be called upon, given this unpredicted and unfavourable change in circumstances this year, to an extent estimated at CHF 0.5 million. The Revised Budget 2020 document describes the background to the estimates, and the actions taken. If you did not already read document 7, please read it for our work tomorrow.

4. Moving forward together
We will not have a face-to-face governance meeting this year. Therefore, this meeting is important to determine how we move forward together supporting the work of the executive committee and how we adapt using electronic communication for consultation on decision making as provided in our rules. The document on governance matters offers many solutions. You have read the document and I will present the recommendations tomorrow.

We have already proven to ourselves that making decisions using the governing body portal is possible and today we see that convening the executive committee using video conference is also possible. Let us be encouraged.

5. Personal word
I have thanked the leadership of the central committee and the staff. I want to say special word of thanks to other members of the staff leadership group – to Dr Isabel

Phiri, deputy general secretary; Elaine Dykes, the director of finance; and Marianne Ejdersten, the director of communication. Their accompaniment during the pandemic and transition has been remarkable.

I also want to address thanks to our colleagues who helped organise and plan this meeting: Catherine Christ-Taha, Doug Chial, Marc-Henri Heiniger and to our consultant Yorgo Lemopoulos.

The moderator, Dr Agnes Abuom, thanked the general secretary for the report and asked for comments from the floor.

HE Archbishop Dr Vicken Aykazian (Armenian Apostolic Church [Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin]) asked about the possibility of welcoming Bossey students in September given the travel restrictions and how the University of Geneva was functioning. He noted that in other parts of the world the universities will not be teaching in 2020. The interim general secretary responded that those students who had applied for Swiss visas before the end of March were granted their visas and as soon as borders open, they could come to Switzerland. The University of Geneva has informed WCC that they hope to run their courses as normal for the school year 2020-2021. While not all of the Bossey students are expected to be able to come, it is still hoped that at least twenty will attend.

4. First presentation of public issues statements

Dr Abuom invited HE Metropolitan Prof. Dr Nifon of Targoviste, moderator of the public issues sub-committee, to present the draft statement on the response of the churches to COVID-19. HE Metropolitan Nifon said they had agreed that Mr Peter Prove would read the statement after which there would be some time for general comments.

Mr Prove said that quite a lot of effort by staff to bring this statement had been made and that comments from members of the executive committee and the CCIA commission had also been received. He went on to read the text to the meeting.

Following the reading Dr Abuom invited general comments. HE Metropolitan Nifon said that the statement would be more effective if it could be shortened. Overall, however, he felt that it was a good statement and thanked Mr Prove and the staff for the work. Rev. Cora Luisa Antonio Matamoros (Iglesia Morava en Nicaragua) felt that this statement was the most important element of the present meeting. The Latin American members of the central committee and the churches want to know what WCC is doing in response. This statement is very helpful.

Dr Abuom reminded the group that further comments on the text could be shared through the public issues email or through the portal.

5. Sharing by executive committee members

She opened the floor and invited members to share experiences of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic from the member churches.

Ms Emily Evans (Uniting Church in Australia) greeted the group and noted that Australia's situation was different and in a way privileged as it is an island. In mid-March the government closed the international borders and then the state borders quickly afterwards. There have been only 7,000 cases and 103 deaths. The government, schools, universities, and workplaces went into strict lockdown very quickly. Around 20% of the population have lost jobs and the government is focused on bouncing back the economy. However this is not easy with the health crisis.

The church in Australia has not been allowed to gather and has been meeting online. It has taken some time, but services have now improved. Many churches also record their services and post them to Face Book. During this period the relationships with churches linked to Pacific Islander and Asian communities have been strengthened. She added that her church had been resourcing the WCC with prayers during this time.

Rev. Karin van den Broeke (Protestant Church in the Netherlands) shared that in the Netherlands there had been a heavy outbreak of COVID-19 in March and the government had instituted an "intelligent lockdown". People were asked to be very careful and since the population complied, this worked well. The Dutch health system had the capacity to respond to the crisis. The economic situation is difficult in some sectors, while others flourish. She said that her main concern was that because of this special situation, while there is a lot of local solidarity, solidarity for the world is on a decrease and global thinking is almost gone. The leadership of her church is doing well and in particular is paying attention to the refugee situation in Greece, which is a heavy discussion in Europe. The church is in close contact with the government which is very conservative. She said she was happy with the draft statement presented earlier since thinking globally is a real challenge in this time.

HE Metropolitan Seraphim (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa) reported that in Africa a month ago there were 100 cases and 30 deaths and in a short period that has been multiplied five times. In the country there is a lack of capacity to provide food for families. Before the crisis unemployment was high, now it has worsened. Many people make their living on daily jobs. Now that they can no longer work there is a lack of any income to buy food for many. When food aid is distributed by UN or NGOs it is not distributed equitably but rather according to political loyalties. He felt that the spirit of the early church where everyone shared everything should be encouraged. He feared that violence would soon erupt. In the last period 50,000 people were arrested. He asked the committee for prayers for the situation.

HE Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Nicholovos (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church) shared that there had been 60 cases and six deaths in his diocese. The church is not able to provide proper pastoral care, especially in the ministry of holding funerals and loss of loved ones.

In India the situation is becoming very difficult, with the exception of the Kerala area. There are many migrant and day labourers moving in all areas of the country. By now there are 100,000 cases in India.

Rev. Samson Olasupo Adeniyi Ayokunle (Nigerian Baptist Convention) said that in Nigeria cases were reported starting at the end of February and the death rate has been kept

relatively low. There are 10,000 cases with 200 people having died out of a population of 200 million. The lockdown has affected jobs including those of church workers who cannot be paid. Churches are currently unable to send money to those working for the church and missionaries are lacking for resources. The poverty in the country has made the job loss situation even more difficult. As much as it can the church has stepped in, helped with lockdown, providing facemasks and hand sanitizer to the people. He said that in every Christian home sanitizer is provided at the door and strict safety measures are kept. Many churches have recorded online programmes for congregations

Rev. Festus Ambe Asana (Presbyterian Church in Cameroon) expressed his thanks for the wonderful statement which is representative in many ways. He said that the situation in Cameroon is similar to Nigeria. However the health situation is compounded by war. The church is doing its best to educate and meet the needs of the people. While currently being in the USA he had participated in an online Pentecost service for Christians from his church outside Cameroon. Sometimes we are overwhelmed and can become discouraged. Many parishes are closed down, workers reduced, schools have no students. Yet, he concluded, we live in hope.

Bishop Swenson regretted the current horrors of racial violence and protests going on in USA. She added that the church leaders in El Salvador had informed her that there had been a massive storm with flooding and destruction in the country. This was only increasing the need for food and water among the people there. She asked for prayers for El Salvador.

Rev. Dr Hyunju Bae (Presbyterian Church of Korea) shared about her situation through the portal. The church in Korea has been trying to respond to the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19 with resilience and creativity. Online worship has been provided, and some urban churches invented a drive-through worship. The culture of sharing resources, including online technical facilities and financial support, among the established churches and the small churches in need, is strongly recommended and currently practiced. There are pastoral challenges, including how to accompany the individual Christians in need of spiritual support. The lived experiences of Christian fellowship in times of multiple restrictions like this present period when most of the offline church programmes beyond Sunday worship are not available can be quite difficult. The churches ask for theological contributions to find out the ways to live the life of the church, including the Sacraments, in times of pandemics and using virtual meetings.

Since early May when reopening was allowed by the government, the church in general, particularly in the cities, has been witnessing a reduced participation in offline services as usual. For those who are vulnerable, e.g. the aged, the sick, and children, online worship continues to be provided. The tendency to move towards secularism increases because of an alienation from the traditional way of practicing faith by attending the worship in sanctuary and engaging in the face-to-face fellowship of believers and the diakonia for the community life. This is also resulting in the acceleration of the loss of the next generation for the church.

She felt that the time is ripe to realize the importance of upholding Christian values such as eco-justice, integrity of creation, abundant life for all, praise, gratitude, a spirituality of enough, steadfastness in faithfulness, trust, hope, love, mutuality, solidarity, hospitality,

community and so on, in order to deal constructively with COVID-19 and its related challenges. The meaning of individual freedom should be grasped in close connection to the accountability for the life of society and earth communities. The church needs to equip its leaders with the broader and deeper ecumenical perspectives to find ways to reshape our personal, social, business, and institutional life in coordination with a paradigmatic values change. Strengthening local or global ecumenism is a prerequisite for the church to make relevant contributions, beyond its primary function as worshipping community, as a platform of trust, communication, and education of transformative spirituality and lifestyle, not only for Christians but also for local communities in general.

The COVID-19 invites the waves of de-globalization. But such crucial matters as pandemic itself, climate change, global warming, new financial architecture, and nuclear disarmament, require a far closer cooperation on a global scale. Dr Bae expected that the upcoming WCC 11th Assembly would deal with the urgent issues of eco-justice and the unprecedented advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and cutting-edge scientific technology in so many areas of life. The high level of unemployment, which has been sky-rocketing in the crisis of COVID-19, is something predicted for an era of AI. The surge of fear, xenophobia, racism, discrimination, and the increase of mental health problems at the threshold of the unknown world demand that in the upcoming assembly in Karlsruhe the churches together show the world a way of praying, walking, and working together for the alternative, or for a better world, and offer a sign of hope.

HE Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima (Ecumenical Patriarchate), vice-moderator of the central committee, reported that in the morning the Ecumenical Patriarchate had had an extraordinary synod session and decided to open the churches again the following Saturday. This is a day dedicated to those who have passed on. Then services will be held on Pentecost Sunday and Holy Spirit Monday. The churches will open but very carefully.

Dr Abuom thanked the members for sharing from their contexts. She encouraged the members to pray for each other.

In her concluding remarks the moderator spoke about the mission of the church to be present in the community – presiding at funerals, accompanying those in hospital and their families, teaching the children. There are church workers who cannot survive because remittances are not coming to the churches. We as Christians are reminded that we have a sure and certain hope given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, a hope that accompanies us in this difficult journey. Churches are sharing through social media and the proclamation of the Gospel continues. She thanked the committee members for standing firm in their ministries and in their services.

Bishop Swenson closed the meeting with a prayer to unite, to move forward with love, resilience, hope and courage. In the body of Christ all the gifts are present – “we have what we need if we share what we have been given”.

The first day’s session was adjourned.

6. Second session, 2 June – hearing

Bishop Dr Mary Ann Swenson moderated the hearing session on the second day of the meeting. She welcomed the executive committee to the meeting and reminded them that comments during the discussions may be shared through the video conference chat function or through the portal. She told the group that some extra time had been added at the end of the meeting to present a draft statement on the situation in the US. She quoted some of the words spoken in the midst of the current violence by Bishop Michael Curry, primate of The Episcopal Church: "we can choose the way of violence or choose the way of love. We must choose love."

Rev. Dr Manhong Lin (China Christian Council) was invited to lead the group in prayer to begin the meeting. She offered greetings from China and stated that God is with us no matter where we are. This is a promise and comfort for us. The Bible verse John 10:10 had inspired her during this last period. Jesus says "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." How can we believe this with all the COVID-19 cases and deaths? Instead of seeing abundant life, we see loss, racism, violence, war, abuses of natural resources and political power. The ecumenical movement has done a lot in advocating for abundant life for all. One option always open to us, even in times of confinement, is to pray. She led the group in a prayer for wisdom, courage and strength.

Mr Doug Chial, IMD and PMER Manager and co-host for the video conference, reminded the group of the online meeting protocol. He went through the agenda for the day. Thanks were offered to him and Mr Marc-Henri Heiniger, Event Planning & Production Coordinator and also a co-host for this meeting.

Bishop Swenson invited Fr Sauca, interim general secretary, to present an overview of the decisions proposed to the executive committee during this meeting. He went over the matters for decision before the current meeting of the executive committee.

7. Governance matters

Fr Ioan Sauca explained that the document on Governance Matters proposes ways to ensure continued consultation and decision-making using electronic communications. He noted that there was a revision with changes to section G, on matters for referral to central committee.

No in-person meeting of WCC governing bodies is proposed in 2020. In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, WCC governing bodies need to continue making important decisions. The WCC Rules offer guidance on how to do this, while maintaining the ethos and practice of consensus decision-making. He added how helpful the comments to the document on the governing body portal were. The Governance Matters document contains recommendations on how to move forward using Rule XVIII.8, which allows the executive committee to carry out consultation and decision-making by electronic communications such as video conference. Some recommendations are informed by the report of the working group on constitution and rules, previously appointed by the central committee.

A. Governance authority and responsibility

WCC meetings cannot take place in the usual way during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus requiring that the rules be interpreted and applied in ways that best serve the interests of the Council, and meet the requirements of Swiss law. It is the role and responsibility of the moderator and leadership of the central committee to ensure the coherence of the work of WCC governing bodies. The recommendation before the committee is to encourage them in this role.

B. Recording decisions taken through the WCC governing body electronic decision-making portal

The executive committee made three decisions using the WCC governing body electronic decision-making portal in April/May 2020. The recommendation is to record these decisions in the minutes of this meeting.

C. Notice period for consultation and decision-making by electronic communications

The notice period for consultation and decision-making by electronic communications is not specified in Rule XVIII.8. The working group on the constitution and rules has proposed a notice period of between fourteen (14) and twenty-one (21) days for electronic decisions. That is what is also recommended to the committee for decision.

D. Meetings of the executive committee by electronic communications

The executive committee already agreed to continue working through electronic means. The leadership proposes that this is done using video conference technology. The recommendations include:

1. The possibility of convening sub-committees in advance of executive committee meetings to prepare reports and recommendations for consultation and decision-making;
2. Thanking the AME Zion church for willingness to host the executive committee later this year;
3. The possibility to meet in July, September and November using video conference;
4. That meetings by video conference be announced 30 days in advance by the leadership of the central committee.

E. Dates of the central committee meeting

The executive committee already agreed to postpone the central committee meeting until the first part of 2021. Considering the possible evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership of the central committee has arranged to hold the central committee from 23-29 June 2021, with the executive committee meeting 21-22 June. The executive committee is asked to confirm this.

F. Postponing the 11th WCC assembly

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership of the central committee and the host churches assessed that it is necessary to postpone the 11th Assembly in order to provide a safe and meaningful gathering. The German churches are committed to hosting the assembly

and invite the WCC to continue planning for an assembly in Karlsruhe in August/September 2022. The committee is asked to accept the invitation.

G. Matters for referral to the central committee

This section was revised in discussion with the leadership of the central committee based on input from the governing body portal discussion. The WCC rules limit the issues that can be presented for postal or electronic vote by the central committee to those matters that are decided by vote such as constitutional changes, elections, assembly venue and some financial matters. There is no constitutional provision for decision-making on a wider range of issues by postal or electronic vote of the central committee.

Therefore, it is proposed to refer to the central committee for vote, an amendment to Rule XVIII.9 to allow postal or electronic voting on "questions that the executive committee determines are urgent, important and must be decided by the central committee during the period of the COVID-19 restrictions before the central committee can meet". The amendment is temporary and can be removed by the central committee at its next in-person meeting.

8. Financial report for 2019

The Financial Report for 2019 is presented for adoption. The Management Summary describes the work of the auditors, the audit committee and the leadership of the finance sub-committee.

The financial results for 2019 reflect a good year for the WCC, with an increase in funds and reserves of CHF 740,000. General reserves are steady at CHF 6.9 million. Total programme income was over CHF 18 million, including contributions income at 17.8, slightly above forecast. There were no deficits to programmes.

Investment income boosted the endowment funds by about CHF 800,000. They closed at 9.4 million.

Concerning membership contributions, 209 or 60% of the member churches made a contribution, representing a slight increase in the numbers contributing; and with a total collection of CHF 3.8 million, close to prior year.

At the hotel and conference centre at the Château de Bossey, the financial results were also very good, with a small deficit of 85,000, compared to a loss of almost 300,000 the previous year. The Château generated a positive cash flow of 400,000 in 2019, covering the annual loan reimbursement, and some capital expenditure.

The report to member churches in the financial report highlights the work done in dividing the land plot in Grand-Saconnex into ten separate plots, to prepare the land sales for Montreal and Kyoto. In December, the first land shares were sold for apartments in the Montreal building, with 3.5 million in land sales income. By March this year, 22 out of 48 land shares were sold and 6 million of loan reimbursement could be made.

The first objective in the Green Village project is to reimburse a loan of CHF 24 million taken to refinance the pension fund. We have now met 25% of that target, and expect to reduce the loan further in September this year.

KPMG conducted a thorough audit in the first year of their mandate, and met with the audit committee on 30 April. No control deficiencies were raised. The auditors paid particular attention to the Green Village transactions, and reviewed the new control processes concerned.

The financial report is recommended to the executive committee for adoption, following its approval for issuance granted on 30 April by the leadership of the finance sub-committee, further to the recommendation from the audit committee.

9. Revised budget 2020

The revised budget for 2020 sets out why a revised budget is required, proposes a revised limit for capital expenditure and highlights the requirement for continued monitoring.

The potential financial impacts of COVID-19 on the WCC concern activities at the Château de Bossey; the strengthening of the Swiss franc in a time of crisis; the temporary suspension of ecumenical accompaniment activities in Palestine and Israel; impact on investments; and on the Swiss real estate market. Implenia has now advised WCC that the sale of the Kyoto plot cannot be expected until spring 2021. With all of these elements, it was necessary to address the level of adjustments which should be made to financial plans for the year. The committee is asked to approve planning according to the likely means available for 2021, attentive to the requirements set in the financial strategic plan.

In consultation with the leadership of central committee, it was agreed that a revised budget 2020 should be developed and proposed. The principal reason for doing so is to recognise new expenditure limits, and to set new measures against which to monitor and report for this year. Fr Sauca expressed his gratefulness to all the staff who have participated constructively in this process over the last month.

A. Impact on the general reserves

One purpose of the general reserves is to provide “a guarantee of sustainability, should there be an unfavourable change in conditions during a financial period”. In the revised budget, there is an estimated deficit of 800,000 at the Château de Bossey, offset by two compensating credits totalling 300,000. The net outcome is to be charged to general reserves. Mitigating actions at Bossey include the claims for compensation for technical unemployment of about 25 staff, and actions taken to reduce maintenance and other service costs.

If the hotel were to be closed until next year, and all staff released, the deficit would be estimated at CHF 1 million. The closure would also affect the possibility to receive students, and would imply a recruitment challenge for reopening in spring 2021. The revised budget includes the prospect of receiving about 20 students for the next academic year, as well as other sales. Careful monitoring will be required to ensure that results are contained within the revised budget limit.

B. Impact on contributions income

In 2020, total programme income is now estimated at CHF 15.8 million, compared with the approved budget of 17.7, and total programme income last year of 18.1 million. The reduction of 1.9 million in 2020 is not all related to COVID-19. About half a million concerns timing differences in receipts for special projects. An impact of about 1.4 million is attributed to COVID-19.

Expenditure has been balanced to ensure that there is no deficit on the programme funds in spite of these adverse income impacts, e.g. costs will not be incurred for EAPPI accompaniers. In the revised budget travel budgets have been reduced and in-person meetings of governance have been suspended in 2020. It will be important to report to the funding partners on the adaptations to plans, ensuring the partners' goodwill in supporting the work, performed in different ways. There are likely to be challenges for many partners to continue financing work at the same levels for 2021.

C. Green Village

The revised budget includes 18.3 million in sales for Montreal. The sale of Kyoto land, in the approved budget at 20 million, is postponed. In February, and also in March, the steering committee received news of the interest of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in investing in the Green Village project, and more specifically in purchasing part of the Lima building. The news was welcomed, as a sign of the intention of the LWF to remain for the long-term in Geneva, working together alongside the WCC. The proposal is that the executive committee share a message of support for this initiative.

D. Capital expenditure

The revised capital expenditure plan includes the investment in a new IT system, according to the strategic plan for this period. The current systems are not sustainable, and the investment will provide efficiencies over time. The decision proposed for the executive committee is to set a revised capital expenditure limit, slightly higher that that which was approved November 2019, in order to carry out this project. The net proceeds of 9.3 million budgeted for Montreal will be applied principally to reduce loans.

10. Discussion on proposed issues for decision

Bishop Swenson thanked the interim general secretary for the presentation and opened the floor for questions for clarification and discussion. The plenary was satisfied by the presentation.

The executive committee went into sub-committees for further discussion on the three areas of decision:

1. Governance matters – How do the members feel (warm/cold) about the proposed way to continue the work of the executive committee using video conferencing? What recommendations need more discussion or revision before decisions can be made?
2. Financial report 2019 – Are you ready to adopt the report?

3. Revised budget 2020 – How do the members feel (warm/cold) about approving a revised budget for 2020 and the need to continue monitoring the impact on programme work and Bossey? What issues need further discussion before decisions can be made?

The rapporteurs of the sub-committee reported back to plenary.

Rev. Karen van den Broeke reported back from the programme sub-committee. The group had discussed situations in the home countries of the executive committee members. The sub-committee agreed with the proposals in the documents and look forward to another meeting of the executive committee where the consequences of COVID-19 and its impact on WCC's programmatic work can be discussed.

Rev. Karl Johnson (Jamaica Baptist Union) reported from the finance sub-committee. In this group there was consensus on the finance recommendations and it was felt that several of the recommendations in the Governance Matters document would need revision and/or further discussion. These concerns would be fed into the discussions the following day.

Ms Emily Evans shared from the staffing, personnel and nominations sub-committee. This group had only discussed governance matters and had not had time to address the financial proposals. The group felt that sub-committees should not meet outside an executive committee meeting and that this proposal should not be accepted. The next video conference of the executive committee should work in a more familiar rhythm of plenaries and sub-committees for 3-4 days. Decisions by the executive committee can also be made without holding a video conference, using the portal. The need to have a meeting in November was affirmed, in order to approve plans and budget for the following year. With regard to the decision about cancelling the in-person meeting in California, it was felt that making this decision at this time would be premature.

With regard to the setting of the dates of meeting of the central committee, while the reasons for choosing those dates were understood, it was noted that many conferences and church meetings have also needed to reschedule and there may be some clashes in calendars of the members.

It was hoped that the portal could be used more enthusiastically in future for exchange among the executive committee members.

In response to the brief reports from the sub-committees, Mrs Glynn Mackoul affirmed the idea of convening a meeting of the executive committee by video conference including plenary presentations and discussions, sub-committee meetings and then plenary discussion and decision making. The burden of accommodating all the time zones is challenging, but such a meeting would not necessarily have to convene on subsequent days but could be done over a two-week period. The portal could be used in between sessions.

11. Second presentation of public issues statements

HE Metropolitan Nifon was invited to speak about the public issues statements. He reported that various members had contributed to the discussions and that the statement on the role

of the churches and COVID-19 had been revised, posted on the portal and would be presented in plenary the following day.

He invited Mr Prove to present the work on the text for the statement on the situation in the USA. Mr Prove said that he had reached out US-based executive committee members about the statement and that the situation in the US had also evolved significantly since the leadership of the central committee issued its own statement the previous week.

Bishop Swenson reminded the committee of the suggestion by the moderator that an ongoing monitoring group be set up on the racial violence in the country. She said that the executive committee might want to make a recommendation to ask the general secretary to establish such a group.

HE Metropolitan Nifon asked the committee to consider whether a statement is what is needed at this time. The committee could propose to have a group monitor the situation and come back in a week or two. He added that if the US-based committee members felt that a statement was critical at this point, then a draft for discussion and decision would be provided.

Dr Abuom thanked him and asked the committee about other actions that the ecumenical movement could take at this time. She compared this time to that of Apartheid in South Africa and the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) of the WCC in the 1970s. Concrete actions are necessary. She reiterated her proposal for a monitoring group.

Mr Prove observed that a very practical action, such as establishing a monitoring group from within the executive committee to keep an eye on this issue, propose and take actions could be helpful. If the committee wishes to have a statement, then the WCC work done on racism can provide material for it. However, this will then take longer to prepare.

Mrs Glynn Mackoul felt that the photo opportunity taken by the American president standing in front of a church with a Bible moved the situation to a different level for the churches. She commented that, in a way, the statement by the leadership of the central committee had pre-empted the executive committee's ability to speak. Nevertheless for WCC not to speak or take action would not be acceptable given this devastating situation in the country.

Bishop Swenson urged the members to share their comments with each other and the public issues email. She also said that the leadership of the central committee would meet following the meeting to go over the agenda the following day. She asked the members to continue reviewing the recommendations in order to be prepared to make decisions tomorrow.

Rev. Dr Manhong Lin closed the meeting with a prayer.

The second day's session was adjourned.

12. Third session, 3 June – decision

HE Metropolitan Gennadios moderated the decision session and opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. He asked Bishop John F. White (African Methodist Episcopal Church) to update the group on the developments in the USA.

Bishop White said that the previous evening there had been marches and demonstrations around the country. There is some hope that for some of the issues there will be resolution but it is clear that challenges remain. It is a sad and disappointing time. He still believed in the possibility of finding innovative ways to come together for the good of the country. It is important to acknowledge that human lives are important and that this is a critical value for the churches and country.

HE Metropolitan Gennadios welcomed Mr Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, ACT Alliance general secretary and invited him to say a few words. Mr Bueno de Faria said how happy and honoured he was at being able to participate in this executive committee meeting. He was learning from the wisdom, experience and reflections of the committee members. He said that especially in this time which is so difficult the need to work together and frame our actions based on Christian values is greater than ever.

HE Metropolitan Gennadios assured him that ACT Alliance is part of the ecumenical family and that he should feel free to contribute to the discussions.

Before the opening prayer, the group was asked to pray for one of the central committee members who had recently been hospitalized with bone cancer as well as those affected by the COVID-19 virus.

H.E. Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Nicholovos (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church) led the group in a brief litany with a prayer to the Holy Trinity.

Mr Doug Chial went over the agenda for the day.

13. Matters for decision

HE Metropolitan Gennadios referred to the request by HE Metropolitan Seraphim in the previous day for a statement or action by the executive committee for World Environment Day, 5 June. Fr Ioan Sauca reported on the various activities being done by the staff, networks and partner organizations for the World Environment day:

- A “Resource Guide on Rainforest Protection for Religious Communities,” produced by the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, would be released on 5 June as part of World Environment Day. The WCC is part of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative through its programmatic area of Care for Creation and Climate Justice.
- A Webinar on Sustainable Environment: Churches in Action, jointly organized by the National Council of Churches in India and the WCC would take place on 4 June.
- A statement by Religions for Peace on “Protecting Rainforests as a Moral and Spiritual Responsibility: Global Faith Leaders Stand Together Against Tropical Deforestation”, would be issued on 5 June.

Fr Sauca did feel like there was no need for a new statement in the light of these other actions.

HE Metropolitan Gennadios asked Mrs Anne Glynn Mackoul to read each of the proposed recommendations out loud for decision by the committee. Below is the record of decisions made by the executive committee.

A. Decisions on governance matters

1. Governance authority and responsibility

The executive committee asks the leadership of the central committee to continue identifying important issues for which decisions by governing bodies are needed and to facilitate decision-making processes of the executive committee, using electronic communications for consultation and decision-making as provided for in Rule XVIII.8, and, when necessary, refer the decisions that must be taken by the central committee, applying the provisions of Rule XVIII.9.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

2. Recording decisions taken through the WCC governing body electronic decision-making portal

The executive committee records the following decisions in the minutes of the executive committee meeting 1-3 June 2020:

a) *For the time being, till a meeting of the WCC executive committee can be organized, I agree that the executive committee will make decisions deemed as due and necessary by the leadership of the central committee (moderator, the vice-moderators and the general secretary) through electronic means.* [Approved unanimously through electronic decision-making.]
b) *I agree to confirm the appointment of Fr Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca (Romanian Orthodox Church) as interim general secretary until the next meeting of the WCC central committee.* [Approved unanimously through electronic decision-making.]
c) *I agree to postpone the meeting of the WCC central committee, scheduled to meet in Geneva in August 2020, until the first part of 2021 given the current situation in Switzerland and around the world related to COVID-19, with dates to be decided at a later time.* [Approved unanimously through electronic decision-making.]

The recommendation to record these decisions was approved by consensus.

3. Notice period for consultation and decision-making by electronic communications

The executive committee agrees that, for any matter to be presented for decision by the executive committee, until the next meeting of the central committee, using electronic communications in accordance with Rule XVIII.8, a shorter time frame as proposed by the working group in proposed new rule XIX.11 guide such decision-making, namely "no sooner than ten (10) days nor later than twenty-one (21) days following the initial request for decision."

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

4. Meetings of the executive committee by electronic communications

a) The executive committee agrees to meet through video conference for five days, 20-24 July 2020, following the pattern of beginning in plenary, working in sub-committees and reporting and decision-making in plenary.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

b) The suggestion action: "The executive committee asks the acting general secretary to inform the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and other churches who were to host the November 2020 meeting of the executive committee that the executive committee meeting will take place via video conference" was postponed by consensus till the July meeting of the executive committee.

c) The executive committee agrees and takes note of the following dates of meetings by video conference:
    a. 20-24 July 2020
    b. 13-18 November 2020.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

d) The executive committee agrees that the leadership of the central committee may call for meetings of the executive committee by electronic communications (video conference) with at least thirty (30) days advance notice.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

5. Dates of the central committee meeting

The executive committee confirms the dates of the next central committee meeting, to be held in Geneva, 23-29 June 2021, with the executive committee meeting on 21-22 June 2021.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

6. Postponing the 11th WCC assembly

The executive committee accepts the invitation by the German churches to host the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in August/September 2022, postponing the assembly that was to have taken place in 2021, due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

7. Matters for referral to the central committee

The executive committee refers the following proposal to the central committee for decision by postal or electronic vote:

> *I agree to the addition of the underlined language below amending rule XVIII.9 until the next in-person meeting of the central committee.*

WCC Rule XVIII.9

Decisions that can be taken by vote according to rule XIX, and questions that the executive committee determines are urgent, important and must be decided by the central committee during the period of the COVID 19 restrictions before the central committee can meet, can also be taken by postal or electronic vote provided that (1) information upon which the decision could be taken has been provided, (2) a notice period has been provided of at least forty-five days between the date of the notice of the vote and due date for the response, and (3) the thresholds for approval indicated in rule XIX are reached by votes cast as against the possible number of votes that could be cast in response to the postal request. The election of a general secretary shall not take place by postal vote. A copy of the communication shall be sent by post and electronically.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

Comments were expressed by several members during the decision-making on governance matters. These included:

- The work of the executive committee will be under scrutiny to adhere to the WCC Rules in the work before the committee. Sub-committees do not have a life independent from the meetings of the executive and for the July meeting, meeting in sub-committees should be included.
- For the next video conference there was some discussion on how many days were needed for the meeting. It was felt that five (5) days should be scheduled but that the leadership would monitor the progress of the meeting to determine if all of those days would really be needed. Each session would be two hours long.
- For some members not being informed of the decisions the executive committee had taken before informing the central committee was unsatisfactory in terms of process. This will be corrected in future.
- There should be a Plan B for the 2022 assembly depending on the global health and travel situation at that time. The interim general secretary said that this would be monitored closely along with the hosts.
- The decision to postpone the assembly is one which normally belongs to the central committee. It was taken by the executive committee in its responsibility of managing risk. This should be communicated to the central committee. The communication to the central committee should also go out before a public announcement is made.
- The leadership of the central committee was asked to share the decisions they make during their meetings with the executive committee. This will be looked into by the leadership.

B. Decision on financial report 2019

The executive committee adopts the Financial Report 2019, noting that in accordance with the support given by executive committee in May 2019, the report is published in electronic form only.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

C. Decisions on revised budget 2020

The executive committee:

1. Approves the revised budget 2020, with CHF 39.2 million income, CHF 29.9 million of expenditure, and a net increase to funds and reserves of CHF 9.3 million;

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

2. Requires continued close monitoring of hotel and conference centre activities at the Château de Bossey, because of the risk of further adverse impact to the general reserves, beyond the revised budget charge of CHF 0.8 million, should the revised profile of sales income at CHF 1.6 million not be attainable;

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

3. Approves the revised capital expenditure budget at CHF 722,000, with a net increase of CHF 287,000 compared with the limit set in November 2019; and to include investment in a new integrated system, with limit set at CHF 416,000 within the capital expenditure budget in 2020;

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

4. Requires, given the indications that programme income in 2021 may reach CHF 15 million, being CHF 3 million below the strategic planning limit of CHF 18 million, that the interim general secretary "present special plans for the sustainability of the programmatic work" at the next meeting, as required in the financial strategic plan 2018-2021, approved by central committee.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

D. Additional decisions

1. Lutheran World Federation interest in co-ownership of Lima Building

The executive committee warmly welcomes the interest of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in investing as co-owner of the Lima building with the WCC, and encourages continued studies in this direction.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

2. Responding to the situation in the United States of America

The executive committee asks the interim general secretary to monitor the situation in the United States in cooperation with the member churches and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, and to explore ways to respond with concrete solidarity and to accompany the churches in their struggle against racism in all forms.

The recommendation was approved by consensus.

The document containing all the recommendations above was adopted by consensus.

E. Public issues statements

1. Statement on the role of the churches in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic
The revised statement was presented by HE Metropolitan Nifon and Mr Prove pointed out changes that had been made in the last day. Some additional changes were proposed. The newly revised statement was approved by consensus.
https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/executive-committee/online-june-2020/statement-on-the-role-of-churches-in-the-context-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-love-steadfastness-hope-and-courage/

Thanks were expressed for the work done by staff and members.

2. Statement on racial justice in the USA
The statement was read to the committee since it had not been presented earlier. The staff and the executive committee members based in the US had contributed to the statement. Rev. Everdith Landrau (Presbyterian Church USA) mentioned the death of Breonna Taylor as pivotal during the crisis and urged that the statement include "women and men" to uplift the gender aspect. Some more changes were proposed and the revised statement was approved by consensus.
https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/executive-committee/online-june-2020/statement-on-racial-justice-in-the-usa/

HE Metropolitan Gennadios closed this part of the day's session, thanking the staff for all their preparations and technical support for the meeting.

The moderator of the central committee, Dr Abuom, added her thanks to the staff and to the executive committee members for their active participation. She also announced that there would be a memorial service for the late Africa president, Prof. Dr Mary Ann Plaatjies van Huffel on the following day. Information on the service can be found on the portal and the WCC website.

Those who are not members of the executive committee were invited to leave the meeting so that the closed session could begin.

14. Closed session

The moderator of the central committee moderated a closed decision session. The interim general secretary presented two interim appointments:

- Rev. Prof. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus (Igreja Presbiteriana Independente do Brasil) as interim deputy general secretary for unity and mission; contract duration 4 June 2020-30 June 2021
- Mr Doug Chial (Presbyterian Church [USA]) as interim director of the office of the general secretariat; contract duration 4 June 2020-30 June 2021

These appointments were confirmed by consensus.

15. Closing actions

Dr Abuom concluded the meeting again expressing her thanks to the members of the executive committee and the interim general secretary. HE Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Nicholovos closed the meeting in prayer.

The first video conference meeting of the executive committee was officially adjourned.

Appendix – List of Participants

Leadership
Dr Agnes Abuom, *Anglican Church of Kenya*
HE Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima, *Ecumenical Patriarchate*
Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, *United Methodist Church*
Fr Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, *World Council of Churches*

Members
Rev. Dr Festus Ambe Asana, *Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*
Rev. Cora Luisa Antonio Matamoros, *Iglesia Morava en Nicaragua*
HE Archbishop Dr Vicken Aykazian, *Armenian Apostolic Church (Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin)*
Rev. Dr Samson Olasupo Adeniyi Ayokunle, *Nigerian Baptist Convention*
Rev. Dr Hyunju Bae, *Presbyterian Church of Korea*
Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber, *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*
Ms Emily Jane Evans, *Uniting Church in Australia*
Mrs Anne Glynn-Mackoul, *Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East*
Archpriest Mikhail Goundiaev, *Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)*
Rev. Karl Johnson, *Jamaica Baptist Union*
Rev. Martina Viktorie Kopecká, *Czechoslovak Hussite Church*
HE Metropolitan Serafim Kykotis, *Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa*
Rev. Everdith Yaritza Landrau, *Presbyterian Church (USA)*
Rev. Dr Manhong Lin, *China Christian Council*
HE Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Nicholovos, *Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*
HE Metropolitan Prof. Dr Nifon of Targoviste, *Romanian Orthodox Church*
Bishop Simo Peura, *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland*
Bishop Rex R. B. Reyes, Jr., *Episcopal Church in the Philippines*
Rev. Karin van den Broeke, *Protestant Church in the Netherlands*
Bishop John F. White, *African Methodist Episcopal Church*
Apologies
HE Dr Archbishop Abune Aregawi, *Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church*
Rev. Taaroanui Maraea, *Église protestante Maohi*
Advisor
Mr Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, *ACT Alliance* (Advisor)

Staff Leadership Group
Ms Elaine Dykes, Director, Finance
Ms Marianne Ejdersten, Director, Communications
Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri, Deputy General Secretary
Staff
Mr Douglas L. Chial, Manager for IMD and PMER (Co-host)
Ms Catherine Christ-Taha, Coordinator, Governing Bodies and Conference Office (Minute-taker)
Mr Georges Lemopoulos, Consensus Consultant
Mr Marc-Henri Heiniger, Event Planning & Production Coordinator (Co-host)
Mr Peter Prove, CCIA Director